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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 001746

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SUBJECT: REFUGEE INFLOW INCREASES AS FIGHTING ESCALATES IN SRI LANKA

REF: A) Chennai 1426 B) Chennai 956

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The number of Sri Lankan refugees reaching Tamil Nadu shores continues to accelerate. From a total of 304 refugee arrivals in January the number has grown to 1,892, taking the total number of arrivals in 2006 to 5,799. Escalated fighting on the island and the welcome signal extended by the Tamil Nadu government by doubling the refugee dole may prompt even more people to cross over to Tamil Nadu in the coming days. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu's small pro-LTTE parties are trying to pressure the GOI through the DMK to refrain from offering any assistance to the Government of Sri Lanka in the conflict. End Summary

REFUGEE NUMBERS ON THE RISE

¶2. (SBU) Although the current refugee influx from Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu is much smaller than the previous waves in 1983, 1990 and 1995, the numbers are on the increase. The total arrivals this year is 5,799 including 783 children. The refugees belong to 1,781 families and come mostly from the Trincomalee area. Following are the monthly arrivals since the beginning of 2006:

January:	304
February:	193
March:	70
April:	43
May:	1457
June:	1750
July:	1982

¶3. (SBU) According to Chandrahasan, founder of refugee NGO, Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OFFERR), the numbers are likely to go up in the wake of intensified fighting between the LTTE and Sri Lankan forces. Chandrahasan told us the Government of Sri Lanka is doing everything possible to prevent people from crossing over to India, but fear of getting caught in the crossfire prompts people to risk the boat journey through the choppy sea. Chandrahasan believes that Tamil Nadu could accommodate many more, "may be another 50,000," but the resources at the camps are meager. He believes that in the unlikely event of the numbers swelling beyond "tolerable limits," the police might seize boats and detain boat operators, discouraging people from coming over.

TAMIL NADU'S GESTURE SENDS WELCOME SIGNAL

¶4. (SBU) As of now, the Government of Tamil Nadu's (GoTN's) signal to the refugees is that they are welcome. The GoTN's announcement as part of its July 22 budget message that it will double the dole to the Sri Lankan refugees came as a relief in the camps. According to the decision, the GoTN will chip in extra money to increase the dole already provided to each refugee by the GOI. Heads of the family will now receive Rupees 400 (\$8.5) per month and family members will receive amounts ranging from Rupees 144 (\$3) to Rupees 45 (approx. \$1). Additionally, the GOI continues to provide rice at nominal prices.

LTTE'S TAMIL NADU FRIENDS STEP UP PRESSURE

¶5. (SBU) Meanwhile, the small pro-LTTE parties of Tamil Nadu have criticized the GOI for providing training in Tamil Nadu to Sri Lankan "security forces." According to local news reports, both the MDMK and the PMK parties have criticized the Central Police Reserve Force (CRPF) for providing training to 44 Sri Lankan police personnel in Tamil Nadu. Chief Minister Karunanidhi informed the Tamil Nadu Assembly that the state is not involved in the police training, and he expressed hope that the GOI would consider the sensitivity of the training issue. In an effort to deflate the same issue, Sri Lankan Deputy High Commissioner PM Amza explained to the Chennai press corps that the program is ongoing police training rather than any sort of military training.

¶6. (SBU) Separately, The New Indian Express reported on August 3 that MDMK General Secretary Vaiko asked Prime Minister Singh not to provide security to a Sri Lankan Navy

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ship transporting personnel to the war zone. Vaiko was quoted as saying in a letter to the Prime Minister: "It has come to my knowledge that Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse has appealed to the Indian Prime Minister to provide Indian naval escort and assistance to help and protect the ship."

RESPECTING DMK'S SENSITIVIES, GOI WILL BE GUARDED

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: The smaller, pro-LTTE parties of Tamil Nadu seem to be pressuring Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi, who has a history of being sympathetic to the Sri Lankan Tamils, to use his influence to restrain India from providing any form of assistance to the GoSL in the conflict. Karunanidhi, who up to now has been careful to avoid any differences with the Center on the Sri Lanka issue, is also eager not to let his government be embarrassed by the pro-Eelam politicians. From our perspective in south India, we expect that the UPA government at the Center will understand the sensitivities of its DMK coalition partner and will keep away from any controversial intervention in the Sri Lankan conflict. End Comment.

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